

The Demon Who Can't Escape

by roroaneim

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Summary: When her clan has fallen with her father being killed, she promised herself that she would never ever run again. But, mistakes happen, her comrades had fallen, she found herself escaping. Will she find courage to face the world of harsh reality and failures? ON HIATUS

1. Chapter 1: The Demon Who Escaped

Yeahâ€| I 'm new here, please be gentle on criticizing me.

I don't own anything except for the OC and plot.

_She hummed softly and swayed her head to and fro as she headed home. Her hands held a bunch of showy bright red flowers she picked from her favourite spot. Another day well spent, she thought. Days like this, she would meditate and practice her jutsu then she would lay on the soft bluegrass under a big meadow tree and stare at the blue skies when she gets tired. It fascinates her how quiet it could be while her mind wandered and doze off uninterrupted. While her eyes were shut, she skipped and glided happily and then hummed again and twirled then finally opened her eyes; she spotted a somewhat spherical white puff that bloomed alongside the rocky path she was walking. She sat down and smiled in front of it and carefully picked it up. She stood up and continued walking while she stared at the lone dandelion she plucked. Her eyes gleamed in amusement. She blew on the dandelion and there goes the white pappi, floating in the air. Her gaze followed at the white parachute-like things dancing in front of her, going higher and higher up the sky. She giddily followed where the wind took it and there she saw a large black smoke building up the heavens. Her gaze went down and her ash colored orbs couldn't believe what she was looking at. _

_She ran inside the village and the whole place was in total chaos. People are being slaughtered and tossed in the fire. Their houses were being burnt to ashes. The people she knew were on their knees and crying. They were good folks. Even children weren't spared. She

hid herself behind a nearby tree to avoid being noticed by those people who suddenly attacked her village. Her heart was thumping uncontrollably fast. Her mind couldn't stop thinking about her family. She ran cautiously behind the bushes and headed for her house. And there it is, her house or what used to be a house, burnt to ashes. She started to panic and ran towards the house and her face was painted with horror. A part of her wanted to cry and scream for help but she knew that wouldn't be a good idea. She was just a child. Confused and scared. Her knees wobbled and tears started to well up. Her cheeks felt hot but her body felt numb and cold. She couldn't think straight. A shiver went up her spine and there, something hit her. She was all alone._

"_Mother! Father! Where are you?" She shouted at the top of her lungs. She called out again and again but no one answered, then three men wearing an outfit which she thought was quite familiar. They ran towards her. As if in shock, she just stood there and stared at them. Suddenly, a familiar voice snapped her out of confusion._

"_Lady Ryo! Run! Over here!" The young man's face was pale and he was bathing in his own sweat. His white haori was all soiled with dirt and blood. She ran towards him and he grabbed her hand leading her towards the woods. His legs were evidently beat but he lifted her up and carried her. She gripped on his broad shoulders tightly and hid her head._

"_Where are they Haku? Where is okaa-san and otou-san? Are they all right?" Her voice was wavering but she kept it all in and kept her strong front. They lost one of their pursuers but the other two were still catching them. The wind was brushing against her cheeks while she waited for his answer. He shook his head then ran faster. Her eyes widened. Ryo placed her palms against his cheek then stared at his thin face. She was about to cry._

"_What do you mean Haku? Are they dead? What is happening?" Haku sighed and looked at his back. He slowed down a bit and turned to his left. Haku spotted a shadowy area and settled Ryo there._

"_Haku? What's going on?" She grasped on one of his sleeves. He knelt down and patted her head._

"_I don't know either, Ryo-dono, but I assure you, they are safe. You're father is a one tough nut" He smiled earnestly. She tried to smile back but she just couldn't. Her heart was aching and worry filled her head. Haku panted and rested near her. He coughed and placed his hand over one of his sides._

"_Haku! You're bleeding!" She couldn't help herself. Tears started to fall from her gray eyes. He was impaled by one of the attackers but he managed to escape and find her. She tried to help him by putting pressure on his wound but he only groaned in pain._

"_Hakuâ€| Haku, I don't know what to do. Please don't leave me! I'm scared Haku, promise me you'll be alright." Her vision blurred, tears fell down nonstop. His lips slowly curved into a weary smile._

"_I know, I know," He coughed. Haku held her hand and returned it on her lap then continued to speak, "You'll be alright, I will protect you. When I first came into your house, didn't I promise you that I will protect you no matter what happens? This is nothing Ryo-dono,

I'll be fine after I get a rest." Haku closed his eyes and ruffled then patted her head while a smile was still plastered on his face. It was a habit of his to comfort her. Whenever she was down, he would pat her head and say everything will be alright and her face will lit up again. She didn't really have much friend. The count was, one to none. And that one, was him. All the kids in their village would not even dare to come close to her. It was not because she was a monster or anything but, they have too much respect for their family that they would feel so inferior and lowly to mingle with her. That didn't make her happy at all._

It was getting dark, they have been sitting there for an hour or so. She tried to be alert and keep her cool down but she couldn't stop worrying about her mother and father. The wind was blowing harshly and the cold started to bother her fragile body. She tugged on Haku's sleeves and pulled on it twice.

"_Haku, I'm cold. Haku?" She shook him but to no avail, he wasn't waking up. Ryo sat beside him and leaned on his shoulders; she curled up into a ball and hugged her knees. She tried to wake him up. She bumped her body against his but he wasn't moving at all. Ryo held his hand and squeezed it tightly._

"_Haku—" She paused._

"_Your hand is freezing." She sniffed then held his hand close to her chest. She tried to suppress her tears but she couldn't._

"_Haku, you promisedâ€|" Ryo gave another squeeze on his hand and then gazed at him. He looked so calm yet the pain he went through was evident. The wind blew against his short black hair. She buried herself behind him and closed her eyes. Her mind slowly drifted away while her body felt the chills of the night._

The blinding light of the sun awakened her. Her eyes flickered then open. She stared blankly up the trees. Haku died last night; her mind wandered. She stared at him once again. He was seated there beside her, perfectly still. She could just pretend that he didn't die at all and he was only taking one of his lazy long naps, but she couldn't trick herself. That is the reality of life, of human life.

Haku was not one of them but, he served them very well. He was loyal, trustworthy, kind and especially, a great friend. She wondered that, if he was an oni then he could still be breathing and talking to her by now. He could've just taken any blow from a sword and bleed but wouldn't freaking die. Ryo wanted to get mad at him for being a human but, she can't. It was that, she thought that, humans are so fragile and limited. Ryo stood up, finally and gave another glance at him. Her eyes were filled with loneliness but she managed to smile at him one last time.

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_She left him and headed to the nearby lake. Ryo splashed a handful of water to her face and then she began to recollect her thoughts. "Now what?" She thought to herself. If she headed East, she'd be going to the opposite direction of their village. Ryo knew she couldn't go back, not now that Haku has sacrificed himself just to get her out of that mess. But then again, she wanted to look for her

father and mother. She just have to look hard enough for one last time._

Ryo climbed over the walls separating their village from the forest. The fire that set the village into hell she saw yesterday was now extinguished. The attackers of the village were marching to and fro and checking up on the dead bodies scattered. Trying to be cautious, they were impaling the bodies one last time and dumping them at a corner. She tiptoed all the way at the back of a hut and kept her eyes peeled open for any sign of her father or mother, but there was none. Ryo was at the back of a cart when a large troop came marching in. Soon, a tall man with a long beard appeared out of nowhere. He gave Ryo the idea that he was a man of high stature, not because of the presence of the beard but because of the clothing he was wearing. He wore an elegant looking haori with red linings along it and a plain white kimono inside paired with a beige hakama. What was strange was that, the haori was familiar. She gasped.

"_But of course! It's a sign of leadership of an oni clan! So that's why it was so familiar. Oto-san owns one of those." She exclaimed then she immediately covered her mouth. "But why? Why would a leader of an oni clan attack a fellow oni?" The sight boggled her mind. She intently gazed at them trying to make sense of what was going on. The man barked orders at them, he was obviously not pleased._

"_Find him! We must find him or the Lord won't be amused about it!" He yelled at the men and pointed at different directions. The men were dispatched and left marching. After the crowd was cleared, the oni leader was left alone with another man and a little boy about Ryo's age. The man was evidently an attendant to that oni leader. He was wearing a black haori and kimono. His red hair was tied back neatly and it looks like "Yes, my lord" was his favorite words. His face was stern and serious that the aura that he was emanating was the aura of discipline._

Ryo observed them closely. She looked at the little boy and a bell rang inside her head. Her eyes widened.

"_That, that kid! I know him! He's from the West oni clan." She could never forget that boy who once visited this very own village with other important people from other clans. He was wearing sophisticated clothes and his blonde hair dangled against the breeze and fell effortlessly in place. Even his posture gave away the fact that he was nobility. The blonde boy wandered around the court and observed the place. He walked towards a cart filled with hay. Ryo shivered and crouched really really low trying not be seen. The boy tapped on the cart and Ryo flinched but she immediately stifled her voice. He spotted Ryo who recoiled from his sudden tapping of her hiding place. The kid smirked with a smug look. She furrowed her brows and she started to panic. Her gray eyes met his red ones. She couldn't just run because there were guards scattered everywhere. Her face was full of terror and she was obviously about to cry. He turned his back and returned to his companions. She couldn't believe what happened but she was a bit curious, not thankful, about why he didn't compromise her. Soon, the three were out of her sight and there were only about two or three guards roaming around the area._

_Ryo swiftly ran across the yard and snuck behind a bush. Carefully, she observed her surrounding; her feet took her to the market place of their village. As if it was her fate to be spotted, she tripped

over and caused her to draw attention._

"_There she is! The daughter of the clan leader! Get her! Don't let her escape she might know something." One of the men shouted at the others._

She tried to escape but her young and thin legs were outmatched by their brute endurance. They caught her. She wriggled to set herself free but it didn't happen. Their loutish strength was nothing compared to her small, thin and starving body. She calmed herself and then bit the arm of the man holding her. The man groaned in pain and accidentally dropped her but the other man caught her. He grabbed her hair and pinned her down then started to tie her arms behind her. But then, a man with a jet black hair and gray eyes appeared.

The man tying her down got distracted and she managed to run towards the man who suddenly appeared. She hugged his legs tightly. Her eyes started to well up.

"_Otou-san! I thought you wereâ€|" She paused. She shook her head then continued, "Where is okaa-san? I'm glad you're okay!", she said excitedly. His face softened. The girl was really happy to see her father alive and well. "Don't worry Ryo, everything will be alright, your mother is safe." He smiled down at her revealing fine lines on his pale face._

At that time, she felt safe and warm.

One man shouted, "Surrender now and we will spare your life and your daughter!" The man taunted. Her father shifted to his opponent once again and unsheathed one of his katana from his scabbard placed on his right hip. He gripped on the hilt tightly. This was a sign saying that Ryo's father was not going to give up that easily without putting up a fight. They readied themselves and started to attack continuously. Although he was fighting against three men, he could still clash swords with them easily until more enemies were in sight. He groaned and glanced at his daughter then furrowed his brows. One of the assailants noticed he was distracted and grazed his right shoulder making him to retract. The incoming enemies were getting closer; he pulled out one of his katana and tossed it to Ryo. He intently looked at her.

"_You know what this means right?" He smiled apologetically. Ryo's grasp on the sheath tightened._

"_But-_

"_As long as you have that, our clan will endure. Now, go!" He did not wait for her to answer. He immediately faced his foes and charged at them. She could only do nothing but, run. Ryo sprinted out of the scene. Her cheeks felt hot tears flowing from her eyes. This was only the thing she could do, run and be saved. First Haku, and now her father. Ryo could fight but, the thing was, she was too scared to even go back and help. She shook her head while tears were dripping from her eyes and looked back at her father one last time. She saw how they struck and took him down. Her hands clasped the katana on her hand tighter and looked ahead. One person was running far behind her, trying to catch up. She ran towards the woods until their silhouettes were out of sight._

"Otou-sanâ€| Haku-" She muttered softly then, her eyes fluttered open. It was just a dream; she sighed and crept inside her futon. She sniffled quietly and didn't bother getting out of her futon, face still covered with blanket, she immediately got up, and to her surprise she bumped her head hard on a wood. The ceiling on her room was just too low. This room was given to her because her brother said that it was too luxurious for her and those rooms were intended for stay â€" in students not for 'faculty members' (actually, there were many empty good rooms) Besides, she was the only one who could fit there and she couldn't argue with her brother. "Ow" She rubbed her forehead and dumped her body again on her futon. "Tsk, I hate this room. I'm getting taller and bigger too you know, onii-san!" She screamed inside her head.

"Kosuke-kun! Rise and shine! We've got loads of work to do!" The silence was shattered like a glass. Her heart jumped. She accidentally bumped her head again against the ceiling which made a large thudding sound.

"Did you bump your head again Kosuke-kun?" Then an obviously muffled giggle could be heard outside the room. She rubbed her temples and crouched slowly out of her futon avoiding to crash the ceiling again.

"Shessh, shut up. What do you mean by 'we' got lots of work to do? Sounds more like '_You've got lots and lots of cleaning to do'_ to me" Her cheeks started to feel hot and blood in her veins started to boil. She got out of the room safely and proceeded to the kitchen. Another boring and tiring day she thought. She washed her face and tied her mid length chestnut colored hair up then grabbed her tasuki and tied her sleeves up to begin working. This was her daily routine, get up early, clean, clean and clean. Nothing special and nothing to be happy about. Her life bore her. "_'Kosuke-chan, sure your life at Shieikan Hall will be exciting. You won't regret it. You'll learn what you need to know'_ He says! Pfft. What an evil way to convince me" She reenacted everything her brother told her in detail while she filled a bucket with water; it kept replaying inside her head how gullible she was when she was younger. It has been 2 years since she was staying at the famous Shieikan Hall. Shieikan hall, the famous Tennen Risshin-ryu dojo for aim high peasants to be a samurai which was founded by the Kondou family [1].

"I thought, when I came here, I would be able to learn something, but no! He just wouldn't let me." She grunted then scrubbed the wooden floor harshly. She sighed heavily and looked out the garden. It was still dawn and there weren't much people out. Her mind wandered again and as if in trance, she picked up a mop stick and proceeded outside. She searched the area if anyone was already up and there was none so far. Kosuke closed her eyes slowly and deeply inhaled. Though she was using a stick, she imagined that it was a sharp and merciless sword. She struck and beat the air countless times as if she was striking an invisible man. Every early morning, she would practice her kenjutsu; she improved by just observing the students and the teacher whenever they were training while she was doing her chores. One thing good about her was her memory; she could memorize anything immediately and store it inside her head and would stay there forever until it becomes useful.

"One, two and strike!" She hissed then struck the tree violently as hard as she could.

"Kosuke-kun? What are you doing?" Kosuke immediately froze and faced the owner of the voice she just heard. There stood a young man wearing a dark blue kimono matched with a black haori. The morning breeze blew and sent chills to her body. His black mid length hair swayed along the gentle breeze. She was still petrified for a moment and then she randomly smacked the trunk of the tree and hit a big fruit fly, coincidentally.

"Ah! Hijikata-san! Err, I was just killing that large bug I saw and uhmm—" Kosuke said while she scratched her head and made awkward and random gestures in the air. His bright purple eyes were fixated on her then his brows furrowed. Hijikata placed his right hand on his hips and started to talk.

"Kondou-san is looking for you" He declared and then turned away. She nodded accordingly then she subtly chuckled sheepishly. She picked up her cleaning materials and started to put them inside the bucket when Hijikata suddenly spoke.

"By the way, that is not a bug, that's a fruit fly" Before she could utter a word, he left. Her brows were now knitted together.

"I know that!" She said denying her stupidity after he left then she continued to speak, "Kuso! Haaah! I made myself look like an idiot again." She heaved a sigh. Kosuke headed to the shed and left her cleaning stuff at the corner. She headed for the water pump and washed her hands and dried it with her black sleeves. Afterwards, Kosuke looked for Kondou whom she found at the training grounds.

"Ah, Kosuke-chan, where were you? I was searching for you high and low but couldn't find you." Kondou said while a big grin was plastered on his face then ruffled her hair. She slouched then folded her arms and then pouted her cheeks.

"Then you weren't looking hard enough, onii-san" Her tone became peevish and cynical. Her gray orbs looked at him and then stared at the ground while she kicked small rocks.

"I told you I hate it when someone messes with my hair." Her lips curled into a big frown.

He tousled her hair again as if ignoring her and chuckled loudly but somehow his face was full of annoyance. His brows arched and said, "Look here smarty pants, Gen-san said that the kitchen is running out of supplies, get the list from our guy and here is the money, now get going, Kosuke-chan" She groaned in protest and turned away from Kondou and walked lazily while she bowed her head.

"Oh, and by the way Kosuke-chan, don't wander off like you did before. Come home immediately. They need those things quick." He stood up and headed inside the hall. She groaned again and sighed before she proceeded to the kitchen.

"Ugh, what's with him calling my name with a _chan_?"

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The market was lively and full pack with people. There were lots of

interesting stuff to see and places to stroll that she almost forgot that she has to buy some things. It was near dusk when she finished shopping. Ryo knew Kondou is so drop dead worrying now and she got lots of scolding to hear later. Well, not that she was afraid of being reprimanded the whole night or anything like that.

It was already sun down when she arrived near the entrance of the Dojo and there Kondou and Shuusai were standing talking to a young woman and a boy. The lady with reddish brown hair and a fair complexion was wearing a vermillion kimono and a straw sandal. The little boy has the same hair color which was tied up and he was wearing a crimson kimono. They seemed to look absorbed in whatever they were talking about so it was time for Kosuke to escape or try to escape from being reprimanded because of wandering off and coming home late. She walked closely along the walls carefully, avoiding to be noticed. She was nearly inside the gates when suddenly, Kondou grabbed her collar and raised her. His other hand rested on his side. She wriggled and protested for him to let her down.

"Where have you been?! They were looking for the stuff they asked you to buy but you did not come home early! Most importantly, I was worried about you. I thought something happened to you. I sent someone to look for you!" Kondou let her down and then he folded his arms; his eyes filled with concern. She fixed her kimono and raised her left index finger as if she was about to point out something big. Kosuke was about to talk when Shuusai interrupted. He cleared his throat and gestured Kondou to face the two people still standing in front of them. Kondou scratched the back of his head and then chuckled awkwardly.

"Oh, right, right. Mitsu-san, Souji-kun this is my very naughty brother, Kosuke." He patted her head and then continued to talk, "Kosuke-kun, this is Mitsu-san and that is her brother Souji-kun. He will be staying here with us" They bowed at each other then Kosuke slapped Kondou's hand off on the top of her head. Kosuke stood there for a minute and then attempted to take off while they were still talking. However, while doing the escaping she overheard their conversation.

"Kondou-san, all this time, I thought you have two elder brothers" The lady said while her green eyes were focused on Kosuke. Kosuke froze at that moment and then straightened her body. Kondou looked at Shuusai and then laughed inwardly. Kosuke, apparently interested, she went back behind Kondou and then cleared her throat.

"Well, actually, Mitsu-san, that is a common misnomer. They say that onii-san have two older brothers because I and brother Otogorou is more mature than him so that's why heâ€¢!" Before she could finish what she was saying Kondou covered her mouth and then laughed loudly.

"Okay, that's enough of your jokey joke jokes" Kondou smiled at them then gave Kosuke the stare and Mitsu-san smiled back but her eyes weren't happy. It was not too long when Mitsu-san bid her farewell to them and especially to her younger brother and then left.

"Damn kid, you crushed him" Shuusai looked at Kosuke and then gestured at the direction of Kondou. She snickered. Putting aside the troubles that Kosuke made, Kondou and Shuusai along with Kosuke looked at the little boy left by his older sister. He stood there

looking at the fading silhouette of his beloved sister until she was already out of sight.

2. Chapter 2: The Demon Who Was Found

Thank you for your Review Captaintsukiko34. I really appreciate it.

I don't own Hakuouki, only the OC and plot.

Please comment or review! I'd really appreciate if I could read your insights and thoughts about the story.

* * *

><p>When Ryo's father showed up, she thought everything is going to be fine, until more of those people came. He was outnumbered by the men of the west clan.</p>

"_As long as you have that, our clan will endure. Now, go!"_ It was the last thing she heard from her father. She was petrified for a moment but there was nothing she could do to help so she ran away. She ran and ran, as fast as she could. They tried to catch her but luckily she escaped in one piece. His father on the other hand, was killed. He refused to surrender and give what they were asking for. Days had past and she was still directionless, she wandered around the mountains. Somehow, Ryo and her mother found each other.

After a year or so, her mother became a concubine of a daimyo in Tsu domain. In spite of Ryo's mother being his mistress, the people treated them appropriately and with respect. However, some did speak ill of them such as the in laws of the daimyo. Nevertheless, there, they built a new life. Because they were still hiding from the West oni clan and the Satsuma Clan, Ryo changed her name to Kozue and took her mother's last name. Eventually, her mother and the daimyo had a child. Kozue became very close to her little brother and everything was simple and easy. But it seems like a serene and 'normal' life was just another pipe dream.

The Satsuma sent some oni of the western clan to the Tsu domain to capture them. It seems like the Satsuma scum were persistent on finding them to gain the secrets of the North oni clan. They'd do anything, even destroy another village, just to get their grubby hands on it.

They assaulted the village where Kozue and her mother along with her brother were residing. The once peaceful and simple life was robbed from them. Taking the high stature of the daimyo for consideration, they approached him and asked him to surrender them and no blood will be spilled, unnecessarily. The daimyo weren't in favor and was ready to refuse but naturally, the people behind him tainted his mind with poisonous opinions. They told him that it would be unwise for him to refuse just for a woman plus the people under their influence lives would be much imperative than Kozue's and her mother. The logic was simply, a whole village is greater than two outsiders. He could do nothing but to secretly send a servant to deliver a message to Kozue and her mother to escape immediately while their pursuers are on their way.

"Omasumi-san! Are you in there?" The plain shoji screen slid open. A beautiful young woman with hazel hair adorned with few simple red kanzashi flowers revealed herself. Her small mouth curved into a genuine smile.

"Hibine-san, what-"

He was panting and catching his breath from all that running from the main house. Hibine did not wait for Masumi to finish talking.

"Omasumi-san, you have to!" He gulped and inhaled deeply then continued, "you have to leave this place immediately!" His amber orbs met with her turquoise ones. Her brows furrowed and panic can see through her face.

"What- What do you mean Hibine-san?" Masumi's face became rigid.

"Is this about Sonomi-san's jealousy again? I-" Again, Hibine interrupted her.

"No, no, no! This has nothing to do with you being a mistress or anything! They're after you! Take your daughter and Yoshitora-dono out of this village immediately! The thugs of Satsuma are on their way here. We don't know why but the Lord can't-"

Masumi's eyes widened. She immediately went outside and called out Kozue's and Yoshitora's name.

"Yoshi-chan! Kozue-chan! Come home now! Hurry!" She repeated this for a while and then she ran towards the patio. Masumi yelled their names again and then she could hear noises just outside the streets. Suddenly, Yoshitora came in front of her.

"Gotcha! I got you! I got you! You're it. Okaa-san, why are you screaming?" The kid was welcomed by her arms. The little boy looked at her with his innocent azure colored eyes. He cupped her cheeks and then leaned on her shoulders.

"What's the matter, okaa-san? You look pale." Masumi crouched near a bush and scanned her surroundings.

"Yoshi-chan, where is your sister?" She hushed then stroked his hair.

"I don't know. She was playing with me a while ago." He answered playfully then made funny noises while he fingered the dangling ornaments on his mother's hair. She shushed Yoshitora then called out Kozue's name once more with a breathy whisper.

The noise became more evident and it was from the loud footsteps of the men scouting for them. The sound was now inside the house. She could hear some lieutenant barking orders to probe the area. Abruptly, Kozue came out and ran towards her mother. She knew that something was up.

"Okaa-san, what's happening?" She asked breathily. Masumi did not bother to explain but pulled Kozue down and uttered one word.

"Satsuma." Kozue became google-eyed.

"I know, don't worry, we'll get out of here, like before." Masumi smiled at her dryly. Although, Kozue sensed the unsure aura of her mother, she smiled back. Masumi looked at Yoshitora then at Kozue, if they were going to escape, they needed to do it now.

The house was occupied by the scouts and one went outside the patio. They were facing his back and they grabbed the opportunity to sneak out the area and use the other exit.

They cautiously moved away their hiding place but they were spotted. The man started yelling at his fellows that he found them. While carrying Yoshitora, she pulled Kozue to make the running faster.

"Remember that thing we always practiced?" Masumi shrieked at Kozue without even looking.

Kozue whipped her head to face her mother then nodded determinedly. She closed her eyes then concentrated deeply while they were running. Their speed gradually increased that the naked eye couldn't even see them. They passed through their pursuers effortlessly and ran through the streets. Sure, their pursuers were also oni but, it was their advance technique that made them (their clan, the North) much powerful and speedy.

"Heh. So we weren't chasing a trail with a dead end after all." The lieutenant smirked. He hollered orders again to follow them and don't come back until they get a hold of one of them.

"They know how to use it. This will amuse the Master" He snorted then shouted again at the remaining soldiers to hurry up.

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Masumi and her children managed to hitch a ride headed to an unknown place. They sat at the back of the hay wagon. Masumi hugged Yoshitora who was already tired from that entire headache causing run then she patted Kozue's head then smiled lovingly.

"We're safe now." Kozue hugged her knees and then hid her face. For a moment, the gallops of the horse can only be heard. All of a sudden, Kozue stood up making her out of balance for a second because of the moving carriage.

"Okaa-san! I have to go back!" Masumi held Kozue's left wrist.

"What? Of course I'm not allowing you! You know it's—" Kozue let her mother loosened her grasps on her wrist. She looked at her mother's face for a solid moment then immediately stepped back a bit then swiftly jumped off the hay wagon.

"I'm sorry! But I have to go back! I promise I'll follow you! Just go! Don't stop!" She shouted then vanished from her mother's sight. Kozue heard her mother and Yoshitora call out her name but she ran towards the path they came from earlier then their voices faded to an echo.

She arrived at the front of their house; cautiously, she hid herself on the shadows and observed her surroundings. The house was quiet and the place was completely deserted. Kozue tiptoed inside the house and her guess was right. They rummaged through their stuff and then left. They might have thought that her mother have left something important and something useful to them. Inside the house, their clothes were scattered and the fixtures were all opened. To their dismay, they found nothing so they left immediately to follow their trails again. Their other things were broken and left there to rot. She did not mind it at all. Kozue proceeded right away to her room and then grabbed a shattered glass near where she sat. She ripped the tatami mat open and a compartment on the floor was revealed. Kozue opened it and there lay still and untouched, her father's Oboro Muramasa.

She lifted the katana gently. The black scabbard remained dustless after being stored for a long time. She unsheathed it and revealed a shining blade with a magnificent engraving. The tsuka was colored red and wrapped with a black ito. Kozue caressed the blade without actually touching the sharp part (she wouldn't want to get sliced, of course). She closed her eyes then remembered her father. Her lips slowly curled into an encouraged smile. Her eyes opened, the blade shone along the remaining light escaping through the window. Kozue sheathed the katana and stood up. It was near sundown and she must hastily catch up with her mother and little brother. She placed the katana on her right side then again, cautiously went outside.

"I'm coming, mother, Yoshi-chan." She whisphered inside her head then started to walk street towards the sunset.

xxx

She roamed the streets of Edo while her stomach was rumbling. She did not stop looking for them she always said "Maybe, I'll find them today". Her heart wouldn't give up but her body is starting to fail her. For three long nights, she went into circles and only eaten food she could consider edible on the trash, she only slept for more or less than an hour because she was afraid she might miss them or those people may find her. She was shivering and cold but, she always said that it was nothing then she would grip really really hard on the Oboro Muramasa. Unluckily, two rogue samurai approached her then started extorting her sword.

"Oi, girlie, why don't you give us that nice katana you got over there, you won't need it, right?" The young man with black haori told Kozue while the other man blocked her way. She was trapped and no one surely got guts to help her with those rogue samurai. The fellow blocking her way puffed a smoke then threw the remaining small portion of tobacco at the ground then stepped on it.

"Tch, look little girl, you don't even know how to use it so just give it to us. We'll need it to defend the people from bad guys."

"_Like you?_" She thought.

He seems to be annoyed of how Kozue just stood there and said nothing. Her eyes stared at them and gave the I-am-not-giving-this-to-you-asshat look. She planned to escape by using her demon abilities but she was too weak (and starving) to

concentrate.

She had no choice but to draw her sword. The blade reflected the light and gave a little pain on Kozue's eyes. Her left hand was unsteady while holding the katana. It has been years since she last held a sword. She started to feel uneasy and woozy. She pointed the katana at them and set out her toughest look to startle them.

"Pfft. Pfuwahahah! You're already doing it wrong! Are you trying to scare us?" The man with black haori said with an amused face.

"Eh?" Kozue's brows furrowed. She stepped forward then pointed the katana again, confidently. The other man spoke.

"Look kid, if you are going to startle us, make it right. You're even holding the katana in the wrong hand. Hahaha!" The two con men made a jest out of her. Kozue was too weak to argue and too hungry to get angry. She dismissed whatever insults they said and just wanted out and resume finding her mother and younger bro. Kozue swung her katana towards their direction but they dodged it easily while their swords are unsheathed. She got the distraction what she needed. She started to run. Running, it was the thing that she always had to do to survive but, somehow she sucked at it. They caught her then beat her mercilessly with their unsheathed swords. They forcefully took Oboro Muramasa then took off laughing.

"Damn it!" She shouted then slammed her fists on the ground. Blood from her lip started to pour on the ground while she lay crouching then her wounds started to heal. The skies made booming sounds and it started to get dark. Then, the rain finally poured. Kozue didn't bother to get up anymore. The rain continued to fall nonstop like her tears.

xxx

After losing the treasure of her clan, then also losing track of her mother and brother, she was aimless. She didn't know what to do anymore. If she would die right now, how could she face her father with honor if the thing he entrusted her slipped easily off her hands? Inside her head was all foggy and her body felt hot. It's been the fourth day. Kozue haven't found anything, even a mere shadow of her mother. She was walking sluggishly under the heat of the sun and her legs couldn't bear it any longer. Her head went blank and her vision turned to black. Kozue collapsed. A Good Samaritan saw her lying on the ground flatly with soiled and wet clothes from the rain. He picked her up and carried Kozue to his house.

xxx

He wiped a wet towel on her face. Her eyes slowly opened and then she tried to get up but the man stopped her.

"Don't, you're still weak. What is your name?" He dipped the cloth in the basin filled with cold water. She turned to face him. Her eyes fixated on him then her brows were knitted together. She was obviously trying to recollect everything that happened.

"My name is Soubei, Kondou Soubei. I found you lying unconscious at an alley where I usually pass through. No one was really going to help you out and you were in really bad condition so I took you in."

He stated then glanced at her, waited for her response.

"Kozue, Kyouhei Kozue. I'm Kozue" She repeated saying her name a few more times as if she was convincing herself that, that name belonged to her. She stared blankly at the ceiling. Soubei squeezed the cloth and placed it again on her forehead.

"Kozue, I guess you might be hungry. I'll get you something to eat" He stood up then shifted at the direction of the door. Her eyes drifted and she started to sleep again. He stepped outside and then closed the shoji screen behind him.

xxx

Soubei, the second eldest son of the master of the Kondou family, took in Kozue. He found Kozue unconscious, thin and weak in an alley. He took her in and took care of her. After staying there for a long period of time, she started to trust him. Kozue told him everything, even about being an oni. At first, Soubei laughed at it thinking she was just imagining things because of hunger until one day, after Kozue got stabbed accidentally because of some unfortunate stupidity, he saw that her wound were healing rapidly beyond human capabilities. He was shocked by the things he learned.

One day, Soubei asked Kozue if she wanted to go hunting with him in the woods. She gladly accepted and excitedly followed him. Kozue carried a hankyu and a quiver full of wooden arrows slung at her back. They were at the middle of the forest and she was falling behind. All of a sudden, Kozue froze looking at a legless reptile with long and fat scaly brown tubular body hissing at her, near her right foot. The snake's eyes and hers met. She was shaking and did not even dare to bat an eye. Its tongue slithered. Even her breath was now labored. Kozue looked for Soubei and he was still walking straight and now he was about 5 meters away from her. She wanted to scream but that would startle the snake and it might sneak attack her or something but she couldn't pretend to be not scared and deal with it herself. Completely petrified for a moment, she made up her mind. She couldn't pretend to be tough either anymore. Kozue have been through too much that she forgot that she could use her abilities as a demon on tough times. She admitted to herself that she wasn't really in full control of the technique she learned that her father developed. Everything started to scare her. Either if it was to escape the reality or to forget where she came from, no one knows.

She inhaled deeply and let out a deafening scream. Soubei immediately looked at his back and saw Kozue wriggling and fall down.

After she screamed for help, the snake was startled and meandered towards her. Snakes wouldn't care if a person spotted them, if they were threatened, the first thing they would do is to rove away but this one is different. As if out of luck, it tried to climb up her body. Kozue wriggled and squirmed to take the snake off. When Soubei was near her, she managed to toss the snake to a different direction but another unfortunate stupid event happened, she slipped down into a slope while she was squirming aimlessly.

"Kozue! Are you alright?" Soubei shouted down the slope. After a long pause, Kozue let out a weak cough then replied.

"Ughâ€| Yeahâ€| I'm alright!" She shouted back up at Soubei. He heaved a sigh and climbed down immediately where Kozue fell. He was aghast at what he saw. The arrows were scattered everywhere and the bow was hanging on a tree. Kozue tried to get up but she can barely sit. An arrow went through her lower right back. Soubei immediately approached her and put pressure on the impaled area.

"Pull it out." She said while gasping for air. Soubei ignored what he heard and ripped out a cloth from his dark green sleeve. Kozue grabbed onto the shaft of the arrow then tugged on it. Beads of sweat rolled down her face. She groaned in pain while attempting to pull the arrow out. Soubei looked at her wide-eyed with panic.

"What are you doing!? You'll only make it worse. If you pull that out now, you'll bleed to death." He pushed Kozue's hand off the arrow then folded the piece of cloth he tore from his sleeve neatly. He was about to put it around her wound when Kozue attempted to pluck the arrow out again.

"I told you, Soubei-sanâ€|" She gripped on the shaft and inhaled intensely then continued, "â€|pull it out. It will heal much faster if the arrow is removed." Soubei struggled to stop her from removing the arrow but she hastily extracted the bloody arrow out of her lower back. She made an effort to muffle her scream from the pain. Kozue dropped the wooden arrow that pierced her then passed out. He couldn't now believe what he was seeing. The arrow left a clean hole on her back, size about an inch. Right after the arrow was pulled out, the bleeding stopped. Damaged muscle tissues started to repair themselves then the pierced skin began to close the wound out; as if there was no accident or injury happened.

xxx

After a week, Soubei didn't speak even a single word about the incident. Nevertheless, they'd do the usual things. Go out and find possible news about Kozue's mother and sibling then buy food and wander off. Their usual place was near a lake and then they'd eat lunch there. They'd talk about many things like how Soubei wanted to do things that he has never done before and about Kozue's silly but very sweet brother. She misses him so much. There are times where she bullies him out of love. She reasoned out that she couldn't resist because he was too cute for her eyes and she wanted to squish-hug him. Her mother would always scold her for making him cry because of those bone-crushing love cuddles. Those were good times.

"Now that you know everything, are you scared of me? Do you see me as a monster?" Her head tilted down. Kozue thought that this was also the reason why the clans of demons were kept a secret and away from humans' knowledge because, humans were scared of them. She picked up a pebble then threw it on the lake. The ripples amused her and how the lake made her calm her nerves. Soubei heaved a heavy sigh then chuckled. He sat down beside Kozue then patted her head.

"Noâ€|" He started. Soubei shook his head slowly then genuinely smiled. "â€|for me, you are just a cute little girl who is looking for her lost family." He resumed. He leaned his palms on the grass then glanced up the blue skies.

Kozue looked at him; he didn't give off a sign of being scared or anything like lying. A smile was carved on her face then she let air

escape her mouth.

"You're just like Haku." She hugged her knees then looked at the steady clean blue lake.

"Hm? Pardon?" Soubei asked while he looked at her.

"Nothing." She shook her head deliberately. They stared at the peaceful scenery for the rest of the day then went home.

Soubei treated her like a real relative like she was his own daughter or sister while she was living with him until he died because of tuberculosis. This shocked Kozue. She didn't know that he was sick for a long time. Kozue thought that she was stupid enough to not be able to notice. He hid this until he can't conceal it anymore because of being bedridden. He didn't want to worry her, he told her. He said that she got more important things to worry about and he didn't want to add up. Once again, Kozue hated the fact that human life don't last long. Oh how she hated how life would play her emotions and mess up her mind. She hated the fact that whenever she started to warm up to others, they'd disappear in her life forever. How naïve, the feeling of closeness and belongingness with other people.

During those days where Soubei was sick, his family helped on taking care of him. This is how Kozue met the rest of Soubei's family. Before Soubei died, he requested that they take care of Kozue. She almost refused and said that they don't have to take care of her because it was too much generosity for someone who isn't even related to them. She planned to travel alone out of Edo and find her family on other places. Nevertheless, she had to accept it because it was Soubei's dying wish and the Kondou family insisted. The head of the family, Shuuusai, was willing to adopt her but she declined.

They sat on a tatami mat and tea was served in front of them. The aroma of the green tea lingered inside the room. Kozue's gray eyes studied the walls of the room. The walls were plain and a single painting was hung trying hard to make the simple room cheerful. The white shoji slid open then the woman who served the tea left.

"Aren't you going to drink your tea?" He grinned earnestly then gestured to the tea bowl. Kozue bowed politely while her eyes were closed then returned a smile.

"So what is your plan now? Soubei told me everything before he died. You're looking for your family, isn't it?" Shuuusai sipped his tea calmly then set it down. He waited for her to respond.

"Yes sir. It should be best if I look into other places, maybe they aren't here." She stared at him blankly.

"Ah, just call me Shuuusai-san. He told me that you aren't really that good at defending yourself. I insist that you should stay here for a while, you could stay at the Shieikan Hall, if you like, and you might learn a thing or two."

"No, it's not that I don't know how to fight. I just..." She interrupted herself. Kozue wanted to tell that it was not because she didn't know, but it was because she was clumsy and that's all however, she continued, "alright, I'll stay Shuuusai-san. Thank you

for letting me stay in your care! I promise to work hard and not be a bother to you!" Kozue bowed deeply to show her gratitude for their hospitality. He laughed inwardly then drank some more of his tea.

"It's nothing. It's all that I could do for Soubei and also to help you." She raised her head then a modest smile was plastered on her face.

"Not found of sencha? It's getting cold." He motioned to her tea sitting in front of her.

"Eh? Oh right, right. Sorry. I like it sir- Err I mean Shuusai-san. Thank you." She carefully lifted the tea bowl to her lips. Kozue slowly drank a little amount of the tea then gulped hard. Her face became grim but tried to look normally okay. Kozue didn't like the taste but, she did not want to tell him that, she didn't like the tea. That would be rude (in so many different levels). She wasn't really much of a tea drinker. And if she does drink, it would only be gyokuro or matcha. Kozue got used to the high quality tea served to them during she was still in her own village. It was not because she looked down on middle class tea but, the taste really is poor. She could really tell the difference by merely smelling it. Her eyes twitched while she sipped the rest of the tea. The tea bowl, now empty, was set down.

Kozue's face were about to turn green. She was ready to puke and her throat felt full with tea refusing to settle down inside her stomach.

"Are you alright Kozue? You don't look good." He brought out a clean handkerchief and offered it to Kozue with two hands. Kozue straightened up then swallowed hard. Beads of sweat trickled down her forehead.

She nodded hastily. "Yes, I'm fine Shuusai-san, thank you." She refused to take the cloth.

"You know, you thank me too much, child. It's alright. Don't worry about it." He giggled.

She felt shy to dirty the handkerchief of a very respectable persona. After that, her face straightened into a serious face.

"Thank you for everything, really Shuusai-san. But I have one favor again to ask." He did not respond and waited for her to further speak.

"I would like to borrow your name for a while, if I am not asking too much." Kozue pleaded sincerely while she bent over the floor.

Shuusai thought for a moment then finally nodded in agreement. Kozue bowed again in gratitude. She explained everything like how she explained it to Soubei. Kozue thought that if she can trust Soubei then she could trust his family too. She needed to change her name even conceal her gender to get away from those who were hunting her and her mother. She'd even cut her hair just to make the disguise not paper thin. It all made sense to Shuusai.

"Then, what should we call you?" He inquired.

"Kosuke" She replied swiftly. She didn't think about it hard. She was making out of something from her name Kozue but nothing came out so she took the first character of her name then added a suke (which was commonly on a boy's name). Shuupei didn't bother asking her reason picking out that name nor Kozue (now Kosuke) bother explaining it either. Shuupei nodded in response. "Then, from now on, I grant you our family name. Kosuke-kun."

* * *

><p>So this is now the second chapter of TDWCE. Sorry if it's slow paced but I just want to give the details on how this and that happened. But the next chapter (3) is where Souji comes in.

3. Chapter 3: The Demon Who Gambled

So here it is, chapter 3! Yay!

**Please bear with me, I'm a newbie here, any reviews are deeply appreciated! **

I don't own anything except the plot and OC.

And oh yeah, Happy Valentine's day everyone! :)*

* * *

><p>The mountains were verdant as ever. The skies, the same, blue and cheerful filled with puffy clouds that make funny shapes with the right amount of imagination. The soil jaded with newly grown soft grass. Birds chirped blissfully as the spring have already dawned upon Edo. The lake, as usual, calming and relaxing like the other day, like the last spring and the spring before that. Like the other day, the day, Soubei's last chance to enjoy the beautiful scenery beside the lake under the shade of tall trees and cool breeze.<p>

Life goes on.

She stood in front of the blue lake. The sunlight pierces through the waters and some little fishes could be seen flocking under the light. She picked up a pebble and threw it as far as she could manage on the lake. It made a splash and created little ripples that negate the quietness of the waters. The fishes swam away. She heaved a tired sigh then sat down and hugged her knees, for a moment, she looked down at the melancholy colored water. She saw her own faint reflection making a gentle notion along the weak waves of the lake.

"I won't be scared of anything anymore. I'll face whatever-" There was a long pause.

"It gets lonely too, you know. _Being left out_."

xxx

"Kosuke-kun, give him a tour of the place and kindly show him his room." Kondou glanced at the little boy who was left in his family's care.

"Ehh? Why me?" Kosuke protested. Kondou ignored any rants Kosuke emitted. He gave her a stern look and motioned at the direction of Souji. The kid is probably depressed. She dropped any complaints and became silent.

The bitterness was evident in his face although, it was obvious he was keeping it all in. Shuusai and Kondou left and headed inside the dojo. Kosuke waited for the new stay-in student near the gates until he was done staring blankly at the path his sister took. After a few more minutes the boy entered the gates with his face, expressionless. The boy walked aimlessly towards the path while his head was tilted down ignoring Kosuke. She scurried behind his back and tapped his right shoulder. He stopped on his tracks and looked at her with his emerald orbs from head to toe.

"Oi, do you know where you are going? I was told to give you a tour and show you the way to your room." She managed to show a forced smile. He was still speechless and nodded obediently. Kosuke took it as a sign of him saying "Yes, I don't know where I am going. Please show me the way, great Kosuke!" And it fed her ego. Somehow, throughout the time staying at the dojo, she grew into a somewhat egoist.

She walked pass him and she started to babble about the places including the schedules of waking up, eating, training and whatever she could remember while Souji just nodded away not listening intently. Kosuke tried to be friendly and welcoming as much as possible. The fact that, he would be living with them for a very long time gives enough reason for her to make a welcoming atmosphere even if she was only forcing herself to. While walking past the common room, Kozue attempted to make a casual talk.

"Soâ€|" There was a long pause, "â€|you got ditched too huh?" Souji stopped then gawked at her.

"Oops, wrong conversation starter," she said. Kosuke snickered secretly.

"Sorry. I didn't mean it that way." Kosuke zipped her lips to extinguish any flames that started. She wanted to offer him a cold pack for him to apply it in the burnt area, and then she laughed at this idea inside her head. Souji halted in his tracks and showed a perplexed expression. Kosuke stopped walking and stared back at Souji with a minimal distance. Their eyes met each other.

"What do you mean?" he asked with a bland tune. She shifted to her course and started again to walk away. Souji did not have a choice but to follow suit.

"Let's walk while we talk and what do you mean by what do I mean?" She stopped for a second then glanced at him with a lopsided smile then continued on her tracks.

"What do you mean by everything you said," he retorted. Before she answered back, they stopped by the kitchen and explained how people take turns with cooking but they (the children) aren't allowed to

help in the kitchen.

"I mean what I said," she explained simply. Souji did not let another second to pass by and quickly let out another question.

"What do you mean by ditched too?" Kosuke looked at him again. They were walking along the student's quarters and near his room. Her lips curved into a sly smile.

"Oh, that, curious eh?" she paused with a grin then continued, "Yeah, basically I got ditched too but it's more like ditched-left out. Yeah, the proper word is left out. That's right. Left out." She nodded her head convincing herself that what she had said was true. Souji did not utter another word.

"Aaand, here we are. Your own room. Dang, I wish I'd had one like this too." They were in front of the shoji screen when he started to speak.

"Kosuke-san, right?" She shifted her direction to face him and then nodded with great enthusiasm.

"Hmm. That's right! The 'san' part is an important part of calling me. Do not forget the san, alright?" Kosuke placed her hands on her sides with a smug look on her face. She felt victorious and epically high just hearing someone calling her with an honorific other than kun or chan. It felt like she was being crowned. Again, somehow, this fed her ego.

He paused and hesitated to speak another word but he tilted down his head instead and thanked her. He slid the shoji screen open then entered his room then closed the screen again without waiting for her response. She stayed in front of the shoji screen for a second then left.

xxx

The following day, Kosuke was sweeping the training grounds early. She saw Souji who just woke up, walking along the halls headed to the common room. She gestured at him just to be friendly but he continued to walk away, pretending not to see her and completely ignoring her until he vanished out of her sight. She felt embarrassed by the thought that somebody ignored her. She waved frantically in front of her face and coughed exaggeratedly; pretending that the dusts were building up ahead of her.

Kosuke pouted while a broom was within her grasps.

"Che, how rude," she scowled then continued sweeping. Days passed then months, this continued. She lived in the dojo that she almost forgot her purpose in life. Daily chores busied her. Since Souji arrived, her chores were reduced and the work is divided; the washing of dishes and clothes plus maintaining the cleanliness of the halls were Kosuke's work and, weeding, sweeping and maintaining the training grounds were Souji's. He lived in the Shieikan hall under the pretext of a stay in student however, just like Kosuke, he was treated much more like a slave by the other pupils and was bullied every time they had a chance not only when they had a chance, and it looks more like every day. They'd call it practicing by beating the guts out of him.

Kosuke wanted to help him but, she kept her nose glued on her face. Kondou also knew about it and warned the other students to back off but eventually, it made the situation worse. They beat him even more and called him a snitch.

After that incident, Souji told Kondou to stop meddling with other people's business, it will only get worse. Kondou was bewildered but Shuupei laid it all out for him. Shuupei said that if Kondou starts pitying Souji then, he will forever seek the help of others. Besides, Souji was trying to defend himself; every time he fell, he always got up and tried to fight with all his might. Kosuke saw through that and understood what the boy was going through so she kept quiet and acted as if she saw nothing, even if it feels really wrong and irritating because of how those bullies get away with the things they do.

Until one day, the master of the dojo and Kondou headed out for some important business. They'd be gone for a week. The battering of the poor kid went from worst to impossible (well, except that it was already happening). While Kosuke was inside the dojo, cleaning, she could hear the disgusting ecstasy of the older students flogging Souji something like lower than dirt.

Kosuke was polishing the floor and all those shouting and laughter made her gut turn upside down. She can't concentrate cleaning. The horrible treatment the older students do to those who are smaller and weaker got in her nerves, she couldn't restrain herself anymore. Anytime now, she would burst. Why can't she just clean the dojo in peace and silence?

Kosuke stood up and heavily tossed the wet cloth on the floor. She took the pail filled with murky water next to her. Veins became evident on her forehead while her brows were furrowed. She slammed the shoji screen open and splashed the water just outside, where they (the bully older pupils) were situated.

She snickered while she was panting heavily from all that anger that was building up inside her. Her feelings were mixed, while she pretended not to see them. Kozue covered her mouth to conceal her smugness. Somehow, seeing them pissed at her made her amused.

The bullying stopped and their glances were focused on Kosuke. Their fists clenched tightly. There were like five or more students doing those horrible things to the boy that was laying on the ground now, his forehead was bleeding and he was full of scratches and bruises. After seeing those atrocities, her blood boiled once more. Her cheeks became crimson and her knuckles were clenched until it turned white.

"You zero wimp! You've got guts for pulling that off, kid! Apologize now and we might consider reducing your punishment and his." One of the boys shouted then pointed at Souji.

"Hmm? I didn't see you. So it's not really my fault for not seeing you guys, right? Not like it's my fault that my hands were tired from scrubbing the whole wood panels- _that you guys keep on soiling over and over to make my shifts triple times longer_, so the pail slipped on my hand. Or is it that hard to make something sink in inside your tiny brains? Oh, oh wait, or do you even have one?" she teased.

"Why you! Shut up! Come here and fight us like a man. Oh right, you don't fight. Hahaha!" The tallest one kicked Souji out of habit.

"Why do I have to?" She scoffed.

"Afraid? What's the matter Kosuke chicken? Can't even throw a punch?"

Kosuke couldn't control her temper anymore. She could take anything they say or throw at her. She would endure everything even if she'd become a wilted vegetable from their beatings. But, call her a chicken? Oh it's on, it's totally on. She climbed down the dojo and headed towards Souji's position passing through the older students.

"Whatever, you fugly. What did he ever do to you people? He only got here and this is how you treat him. Why can't you all just get along and get over it? I'm disgusted how you even dream about being a samurai if you don't even have honor!" She talked very fast because of adrenaline but her voice started to waver as she was standing beside Souji, her vision started to blur. Her heart ached and it feels like she was about to cry but she shrugged it off.

She walked the almost unconscious Souji slowly towards the dojo. She paused for a moment then began to speak again while her back faced their menacing eyes. One of the senior pupils threw a rock at Kosuke and it hit her back

"Oi! You think we're going to let you leave just like that? Although we found a new toy, doesn't mean we can't play with our old one." They mockingly leered at Kosuke and picked up some stones and the others grabbed their bokutou. The atmosphere was filled with sinister aura.

She sat Souji down and picked a bokken with her right hand. She faced her assailants with knitted together.

"Bring it on, weaklings," she shouted. Ironically, kenjutsu wasn't really her forte. She sucked at holding a sword (even if it's only a wooden sword) not because she can't wield a sword it's just that her hands become shaky and she feels uneasy when she holds one. It feels like she haven't got used to it, really. They charged at her and she managed a good start.

Kosuke easily dodged their hits but, in reality, even with her demon powers, taller and bigger opponents, especially boys who were training for consecutive years were bad news for her. Kosuke who sucked at swordfight, haven't trained properly for a long time was a girl after all. She was outnumbered and eventually, she was also beaten up by kicks and struck down by wooden swords. She wanted to use her oni powers and in less than a minute she'd be out of that dumb situation but, she still has pride in the end. Using her inhuman capabilities wouldn't be fair plus she wouldn't really want them to win by being right that she was a chicken. She wouldn't be able to live by knowing that she bottled out because of just some petty matters.

Souji feebly got up himself and trotted with his unsteady gait towards the crowd.

"Now, what are you gonna do sucker? Snitch us to your onii-san? That young instructor wouldn't even raise his voice at us!" They shouted while they were kicking her nonstop.

"I'm your opponent right? I can still fight." Souji roared with all his might. He took a bokken but stumbled helplessly. His body can't take anymore of those merciless blows. After they've had enough fun, they hurled their wooden sword, which was tainted with Kosuke's fresh blood, at Souji's face. He was hit on the forehead.

"Clean it up, mutt. Oh, and yeah, tell your fellow slave friend, that if he tries to meddle with our practice, we'll make him our makiwara again. Be thankful that we are strengthening you up." They let out another laugh then one of them spitted on the ground and they started to walk away.

"Oi! Wait!" Kosuke struggled to get up.

"Eh? Want more beating? There're plenty of that where it came from." They chuckled.

"Wanna bet?" She rubbed her eyes removing the trickling blood from her temple.

"As if you'd win on that bet you want to start. Whatever that is, we'd surely win, because you know what? You're the biggest, lamest sissy we've ever laid our eyes on. So, whatever sissy, the bet is on." The tallest of them spoofed while his friends laughed audaciously.

"Say, if this kid beats you or even one of your cronies during the tournament initiated by Shuusai-san next month, then, that means you lose the bet. Meaning, you'll leave this kid alone until that day comes." The leader of the bullies let his breath escape then laughed inwardly.

"What? Afraid to bet?" Kosuke smirked while maintaining her unsteady bearing.

"Deal. But, if you lose, then, you and him, will do anything that we want." She rolled her eyes with a satisfied smile. There was a brief moment and then she replied.

"Then you'd have to do the same when you lose," she countered.

"Fair enough. As if we'd lose," he agreed. The older pupils turned away and left.

Souji stared at them with fire burning on his eyes.

"Tch, that won't do anything, stupid." She shifted to his direction then suddenly spoke and tried to shake off the dizziness she was feeling then smacked her face. He stood up and emerald green orbs gazed at her.

"Yourâ€| your wounds!" He exclaimed while his eyes widened. She panicked and covered his mouth. Disregarding that he was hurt, she dragged him swiftly all the way to his room. She inhaled deeply and stood beside the boy about 5 inches shorter than her.

"Well, I have to get some styptic medicine for you and some clothes too. I know you haven't got much when you arrived here. I'll lend you some of mine." She faced the sliding screen but he grabbed her wrist.

"I didn't ask for your help." He said in a very low tone. His head lowered then he let go of her wrist. She sighed.

"What? Did I ask for your gratitude? First things first, I didn't do that because I pitied you, I did it for myself. I'm sick and tired of cleaning and hearing their loud annoying voices while you, idiot, entertain them. So you better train hard to make me win that bet, or I'll be the one to beat you up to pieces. Now stay put!" Kosuke immediately left the room and headed to her own room. She crawled inside her cramped room and took out two clothes. She changed her own kimono that was dirty and dried with her own blood and then headed outside the room and grabbed some bandages and antiseptics.

Souji was deep in thought when the door in his room opened.

Kosuke started dabbing some antiseptics on his wounds when he grabbed the cloth from her hand.

"I can do it myself. You can leave now. You're annoying." He glared at her then continued on cleaning his wound on his forehead. She snatched the cloth and stood in front of him with her hands both on her sides.

"Look, basically, Shuusai-san and Kondou-san, the ones who should be taking care of you left, so, technically, they left me in charge of you! So stop whining and be a good boy. Let me do my work! Okay?" She scooted next to him and was about to continue wiping some blood when he protested again.

"Leave me alone!" Souji pushed her. He was being a brat and didn't want any help from anyone.

"Shut it. You don't want to clean and put some medicine on your wounds then fine! But I won't let myself be reprimanded by Kondou-san who would worry about you when he sees you dying because of infections from your stupid wounds! Now stop squirming or I'll tie you down!" He calmed down and let her do her work while he gawked at Kosuke. She started to repeat cleaning his cuts.

Then she continued again to talk, "Plus, if I let you get sick, then I'd lose on the gamble I entered! I won't let that happen, of course."

"Why did you even involve me in that stupid gamble? I didn't even agree to it yet." Souji countered while he was concentrating on ignoring the searing pain he is feeling from each dab of medicine on his cuts.

She stared at him and then flicked his forehead again which made him rub his temple.

"Because there is a reason that you're here, and that is, to let me win on my bet!" She declared triumphantly and confidently while putting some more healing ointment on his cuts. His brow arched.

"Is that supposed to be comforting? Because it didn't work at all," He said maliciously. It almost sounded what Kondou said to Souji (while Kondou was also trying to comfort him) when Kondou saw him staring at the same path his sister walked after she left him in the family's care. He told the boy that everything has a reason but in some way, Kosuke has the talent to ruin a good comforting line.

Somehow, it was really supposed to comfort him but she didn't want to make anything emotional or any closer to that. She knew how Souji must be feeling right now, like how pissed Souji was at the students who beat him up. Her too, experienced how to be thrashed every single time.

At first, they would always made Kosuke's work hard and make her repeat every chore she'd already done until to some point, they started to throw things at her and then started beating her which they called 'practicing' but unlike Souji, she never fought back so it got them bored and there Souji came; their new punching bag. Kosuke thought that, it bore them how they see her every day, fully recovered and healthy like nothing happened.

She prepared and wrapped his large wounds in bandages. It was obvious that he wanted to shout in pain but he was holding it back. She smirked then pressed on one of his bruises.

"Ow! What was that for?" He recoiled then slapped Kosuke's hands off his bruise. Cynical smile was plastered on her face.

"You're holding yourself back. It's alright to cry sometimes you know?" She ruffled his reddish brown hair and then let out a heavy sigh; she was a little surprised by what her hands did. His brows furrowed and pushed her hand away from him.

"No! I won't cry! Never, not in front of anyone and specially not in front of you! I don't even need your help. It's not like I'm holding back anything. It's just thatâ€¦ I don't want to be seen as a pitiable child who always needs some help." His face turned up to the empty walls ashamed of himself. Kosuke was taken aback by his little speech but then she smiled at him crookedly.

"Hmm. What a troublesome child you are." She teased him. He grunted and then turned away from her.

"I am not." He shouted and then ran towards his futon to hide inside his blanket. She basked in Souji's awkwardness.

"But Souji-kun is a troublesome kid." She continued and she was replied by a couple of irritated "No I am not."

"Go away!" Kosuke continued this jest until she was satisfied. She stood up and headed for the door.

"You better change your clothes or do I need to do it for you?" She teased him more.

"Ugh, you disgust me Kosuke." He replied while hiding under his blanket.

"I can do it myself," he added.

"Hmm? You sure? Oh? What happened to the Kosuke-san? I thought I made it clear that you don't forget the _san_ part?" she further pestered him.

"Yes! Now go away. I don't even need to call you that. We're about the same age, for crying out loud! Please leave."

"Oh? But I'm older than you Souji-kun." He scoffed inside his futon.

"_Months_ older! Only months! Now shut up and leave me alone."

"So? That doesn't mean you don't get to call me with a _san_, right?" There was no way she was dropping the petty argument until he complies.

"No!" He stubbornly responded.

"Bu..bâ€|but?" She made it sound so annoying just to make him more irritated.

"Fine! Kosuke-sanâ€|" He paused, "â€|thank you." He covered his face further and said nothing more.

Kosuke placed both her hands on her waist and then smiled triumphantly. _Finally_, she got what she wanted.

"You're welcome," she said satirically. Then she added, "You can use that kimono. I don't actually use that anymore since it's a little bit short for me now." With that, she left him alone, _in_ _peace_.

* * *

><p>So yeah, these chapters are all about their childhood. I know that Souji was cagey and a bit of a brat when he was a kid but, it's interesting how things turned out this way. Here is a sneak peek of the next chapter:

"You didn't really tell me about your wounds. How did they heal that fast?!" Souji furrowed his brows while his eyes were shining with curiosity.

"Oh," she paused then scratched the back of her head while making an evasive expression.

"That's because I drink the great Ishida powdered medicine!" she exclaimed with great vigor.

End
file.